

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

5 request means for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

detection means for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

10 2. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

report means for reporting a detection result obtained by said detection means to a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

15 3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said report means checks an access state by the first inspector at predetermined time intervals, and issues a predetermined reminder when no access is detected a predetermined time after the request.

20 4. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

25 suspension means for suspending a request from a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case at an instruction of the requester.

5. The apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising:

re-request means for requesting a second inspector different from the first inspector at an inspection of
5 the requester to accept a request of a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

6. An information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a
10 network, comprising the steps of:

requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

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7. An program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

20 a code for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

a code for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

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8. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

- a table relating to organization information; and management means for selectively performing by referring to said table a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a
5 predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the target case sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study the case.
- 10 9. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said table relating to the organization information indicates a hierarchical management structure in a company.
- 15 10. The apparatus according to claim 8, further comprising:
a study path pattern table storing a plurality of patterns of study paths for the first study management mode.
- 20 11. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein in the second study management mode, a request for study is issued by specifying a name of an inspector without using said table relating to the organization information.
25 12. An information processing method for studying

a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

referring to a table relating to organization information; and

- 5 performing a managing step by selectively performing based on said referring step a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the
- 10 target case sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study the case.

13. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a code for referring to a table relating to organization information; and

- 15 a code for realizing a managing step by selectively performing based on said referring process a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the target case sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study the case.

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13. An information processing apparatus for

generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network, comprising:

- association means for dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and
- management means for managing generation of the document.

15. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said plurality of steps contain an application and a rejection reason response.

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- 16. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said management means manages generation of the document by making links to a management database for item management and a document database for document management.

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17. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said management means manages generation of the document by defining a virtual file in a network.

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- 18. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein a timing of generating a file is defined in said

step units relating to the virtual file.

19. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a process performed when a file is generated is
5 defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

20. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a timing of extinguishing a file is defined in
said step units relating to the virtual file.

10 21. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a process performed when a file is extinguished is
defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

15 22. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a related document is defined in said step units
relating to the virtual file.

20 23. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a study and approval path is defined in said step
units relating to the virtual file.

25 24. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
said virtual file can be copied, and
simultaneously distributed through a network using a
plurality of paths.

25. An information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

5 dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and managing generation of the document.

10 26. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

a code for dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and
20 a code for realizing a managing step of managing generation of the document.

Sub B17 27. An information processing apparatus for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising:

accumulation means for accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign

application for the patent application; and
display control means for displaying a list of
technical documents of a patent application accumulated
in said accumulation means.

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28. The information processing apparatus according to claim 27, wherein said display control means displays a flag indicating whether or not a prior art disclosure procedure has been performed on the technical document.

29. The information processing apparatus
according to claim 27, wherein
said display control means displays descriptions
indicating correspondence between the technical
document and a rejection reason.

30. The information processing apparatus
according to claim 27, wherein
20 said display control means displays a list of
applications by which the technical document has been
cited relating to the technical document.

31. An information processing method for
25 accumulating technical documents relating to a patent
application, comprising the steps of:

 accumulating a related technical document

including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

displaying and controlling a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.

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32. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising the steps of:

a code for realizing an accumulation step of accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

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15 a code for realizing a displaying and controlling step of displaying a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.

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